DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 142 RC 019 262

AUTHOR Tomlinson, J. R. G.; Mortimore, Peter
TITLE Small, Rural and Effective: A Study of Secondary Schools. Warwick Papers on Education Policy, No. 1.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-948080-70-1
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 68p.; Based on an Invitational Seminar at the University of Warwick (Warwick, England, United Kingdom, March 1991).
AVAILABLE FROM Trentham Books Limited, Westview House, 734 London Road, Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 4NP England, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cost Effectiveness; *Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; Institutional Evaluation; Intermediate Grades; *Rural Schools; School Closing; School Community Relationship; *School Effectiveness; School Size; Secondary Education; *Secondary Schools; *Small Schools
IDENTIFIERS *England

ABSTRACT

Amidst controversy over proposed school closings, Hereford and Worcester (England) local education authorities (LEA) asked for an evaluation of the effectiveness of six small rural "comprehensive" secondary schools (180-450 students) and their importance to surrounding communities. Data were collected on student achievement; teacher and school characteristics; graduation rates; student discipline; further education and employment of graduates; and attitudes of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members. Some very positive findings emerged. As a group, the schools attracted well qualified and experienced teachers and offered all subjects of the national curriculum. Compared to larger schools in the county, the group had higher student scores on school-leaving examinations, fewer discipline problems, and a higher percentage of graduates pursuing further education. The community made extensive use of four of the schools, and the attitudes of parents, students, and local employers were positive. Only the smallest school had significantly higher per pupil costs than larger comparison schools. Differences among the schools are discussed, and recommendations are offered to the LEA and the schools. Educational policy issues related to cost effectiveness, unproven assumptions about school size and performance indicators, school-community relationship, and school choice are examined. A reply critiques the study and its recommendations from a policymaker's perspective. Subsequent round-table discussion focused on the generalizability of the research findings and on the overall cost-benefits of small schools. (SV)

ED360142

Warwick Papers on Education Policy No. 1

Small, Rural and Effective

a study of secondary schools

JRG Tomlinson
Professor of Education, University of Warwick
with a commentary by
Peter Mortimore
Deputy Director, University of London,
Institute of Education

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B. Wiggins
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Trentham Books

RC019262

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Warwick Papers on Education Policy No. 1

Small, Rural and Effective

a study of secondary schools

JRG Tomlinson
Professor of Education, University of Warwick
with a commentary by
Peter Mortimore
Deputy Director, University of London, Institute of Education

Trentham Books

First published in 1992 by Trentham Books

Trentham Books Limited
Westview House,
734 London Road,
Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent,
Staffordshire ST4 5NP.

© Trentham Books Limited 1992

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Tomlinson, John R.
Small, rural and effective; a study of secondary schools
1. Education
I. Title. II. Series
370.1

ISBN: 0 948080 70 1

Designed and typeset by Trentham Print Design Limited, Chester and printed by Bemrose Shafron Limited, Chester.

Contents

The invitational seminar of the Policy Analysis Unit, Department of Education, University of Warwick, March 1991	5
Main Paper: 'Small, Rural and Effective' given by Professor J.R.G. Tomlinson, University of Warwick	7
Respondent: Professor Peter Mortimore, University of London, Institute of Education	55
Points raised in discussion	67

Warwick Papers In Education Policy

The Warwick Papers in Education Policy are derived from a series of seminars held at the University of Warwick and organised by the Policy Analysis Unit in the Education Department of the University.

The objective of the seminars is somewhat different from conventional academic seminars, where the focus is commonly on issues of research methodology, contribution to theory and model-making. The Warwick seminars do not neglect such concerns but their prime focus is upon the connection between policy-related research and improvement in the working of aspects of the education system. One view is that research when published, is rarely used by policy-makers. Our belief is that it should be, and the seminars are intended to contribute to policy-making by addressing policy questions through research findings. The potential benefits are mutual, not unidirectional. Researchers should find the particular concerns of policy-makers invigorating for the development of their ideas, while policy-makers should find research evidence useful for policy implementation and review.

Therefore, the seminars intentionally bring together academics engaged in policy research, those involved at high levels in formulating, advising on, and implementing policy centrally or locally, and other agencies or groups with an interest in education policy such as teacher associations, NCC and SEAC.

The seminars proceed by the presentation of a paper identifying policy issues arising from a specific research project or enquiry. The presentation highlights issues in a paper previously circulated to participants. This paper is the basis for the proceedings published here. There is a formal response usually by someone who is, or who has been, involved in policy implementation, examining the issues further from his or her particular perspective. The response

will normally also form part of the proceedings. Finally there is round table discussion from participants operating under Chatham House rules. The main points, in unattributable form, may be included also in the proceedings.

List of planned seminars

1. *Policy Towards Small Schools:* Professor J.R.G. Tomlinson, University of Warwick, and Professor P. Mortimore, University of London.
2. *Policy on Teacher Supply:* Professor A. Smithers, University of Manchester.
3. *Policy on the Use and Management of Teachers' Time at Key Stage 1.* Professor R.J. Campbell and Dr. S.R. St.J. Neill, University of Warwick and Mr. C. Richards, HMI.
4. *Policy on Grant Maintained Schools* Dr D. Halpin, University of Warwick, and Ms. M. Maden, CEO, Warwickshire LEA
5. *Policy on the Use and Management of Teachers' Time in Secondary Schools:* Professor R.J. Campbell and Dr. S.R. St.J. Neill, University of Warwick, and Professor M. Marland, North Westminster School.

All papers will be available from Trentham Books Limited, Westview House, 734 London Road, Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 5NP.

Small, Rural and Effective

Professor J.R.G. Tomlinson

A discussion of some of the policy issues arising from a research study[1] into the effectiveness of six small, rural secondary schools.

Epigraphs from the Report:

> '...small high schools are, in fact, not so small on the inside as they are on the outside. In terms of the number of behaviour settings, number of characteristics per setting — interior characteristics not easily seen from the outside — small schools differ less from large schools than in terms of number of students and amount of space, which are perceptually salient external attributes of schools'.
>
> from a study of school size in Kansas High Schools by Barker and Gump (1964). Quoted in Nash (1980).

> 'Grown-ups love figures. When you tell them that you have made a new friend, they never ask you any questions about essential matters. They never say to you, 'What does his voice sound like? What games does he love best? Does he collect butterflies? Instead, they demand: 'How old is he? How many brothers has he? How much does he weigh? How much money does his father make?' Only from these figures do they think they have learned anything about him.'
>
> *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1945)

1. *Small, Rural and Effective:* a study of six small secondary schools in a remote area of England by John Tomlinson with Annie Bushby, Robert Burgess, Peter Boyers, Theresa Drew, Eric Jones and Martin Merson. University of Warwick, Institute of Education 1990. ISBN: 0 903198 00 2.

Part I — The Study and its Findings

Hereford and Worcester LEA maintain some secondary schools in their rural areas which are so small that the context of the 1980s, falling pupil rolls and pressure from DES and Audit Commission for rationalisation, had forced the Authority to consider closure on several occasions. By the mid 1980s public outcry at the latest proposals was such that the LEA, many of whose members felt they were being driven by *force majeure* rather than their own wishes or respect for those of their constituents, decided to commission a research study.

The Institute of Education at the University of Warwick was asked to report on two matters in respect of six schools. Were the schools effective as educational institutions? And was there any interaction between the schools and the community around them — and, if there was, did it matter to either schools or community?

These apparently simple questions raise all the most problematic issues about how either professionals or lay people can know what schools should be like and whether a particular school is any good.

In 1987 there were 1663 secondary schools in the UK with 600 or fewer pupils on roll, out of 5161 (HMSO, 1988). Even allowing for some middle schools deemed secondary and some 11-14 schools, the policy questions arising from this study potentially affect about one third of all our secondary schools 11-16.

The project based its approach on two propositions.

The first is that considerable importance was attached to what the schools themselves declared to be their objectives. Were they achieving them? Had they effective systems in place for finding out whether their objectives as stated were being achieved? And, if they had, how was the information so gained used to improve things in the future? By this process the schools are being judged

against their own criteria and according to the systems they put in place to realise and evaluate their own objectives. It is objectionable to judge professional colleagues without taking account in this way of what they themselves thought was important and had set out to achieve. It is also necessary to appreciate that this process works at two levels. There is a public, open and stated set of objectives and methods declared by the school. Typically, since the 1980 Education Act, these have been set out in the school brochure or prospectus. There is also the less conscious level of planning and day-to-day decision making which may help to reveal the taken-for-granted objectives and value systems of the school. Examples would include the option — subject groups available in the fourth and fifth years, the policy governing entry to public examinations, the social systems set up in the school, and the allocation of post of responsibility.

The second proposition is this. By effective schooling the project team meant something simple but fundamental. An effective school helps every pupil to realise his or her potential. That implies understanding of and attention to individuals. However, an effective school also has a powerful and benign corporate life in which values and attitudes concerning relationships between individuals and groups are lived out (not merely advocated). Such schools are a moral community in the sense that all concerned — pupils and teaching staff and all other staff — feel they belong to the school, are valued for themselves, have the opportunity to give service and are expected to contribute according to their abilities. In this way the necessity to promote individualism and create of each pupil a unique identity combined with obligation to others and the experience of working with and for others.

The project proceeded by three broad methods.

Quantitative data were collected and analysed. For example, 16+ examination results, teachers' qualifications and experience ('match'), staying on rates at 16+ and 18+, curriculum range and organisation, pupil suspension, exclusion and delinquency, parental choice of schools, and former pupils' life and work profiles ten years after leaving school.

Opinions and feelings were collected by questionnaire and semi-structured interview from parents, pupils (we especially wanted to give the pupils a voice), teachers, governors, employees, social

services, health and police authorities, and voluntary community organisations.

Observations and conversations conducted by members of the research team, for example with heads and teachers, governors and parents, union officers, church organisations and individuals working in various voluntary and statutory community roles.

The results flowing from all three streams of data were analysed, compared, and triangulated where appropriate, to discern where trends and probabilities might be reinforced, contradicted or supplemented.

Comparisons were made where possible and appropriate with data from three other sources: national statistics; statistics for the county as a whole; and data drawn by the research study from a group of six 'comparator' schools which received a high proportion of 'rural children' but were urban and larger.

The project was asked to look specifically at the schools *as a group*. That is, the LEA based their approach on the assumption that small, rural secondary schools had significant features in common which could be analysed and would be relevant for policy making. The team reported in this vein, as requested. But such significant differences between the schools also appeared that mention of them was also made in the Report. There is no such thing as the paradigm of the small, rural secondary school.

As well as undertaking the enquiries already mentioned, the team prepared chapters on the social and economic background of the area served by the schools, and on present views of 'effective schooling', 'rurality' and 'community', by way of context. The Report runs to 339 pages. The following extracts provide background about the schools and summarise the findings and recommendations. Those seeking details of method and findings are referred to the Report itself.

In considering the policy implications of the research it is important to note how many factors the six schools had in common. It is rare in research into educational institutions to find that a significant number of variables were held steady, allowing others and their effects to be discerned and studied. It makes the findings, within their limits, more interesting and robust.

The following extract from the Report develops this point and will also give new readers a glimpse of the schools in their similarities and diversity as background to the rest of this discussion.

> 'In thinking about schools it is useful to make a distinction between those factors which are outside the school's control (what Peter Mortimore describes in *School Matters* as 'The Givens'), and those factors which the school can control, through its policy.
>
> Many of 'the givens' which could be expected to be important discriminators in other kinds of study are for this group of schools the same or very similar. They are all secondary comprehensive schools, admitting pupils without any academic selection at 11+ and from broadly homogeneous socio-economic groupings. They are all county schools (as distinct from having voluntary controlled or aided status) and they all admit both boys and girls. They are all maintained by the same LEA and thus subject to a uniform policy in respect of resourcing, in-service training opportunities, the work of the advisers/inspectors and the provision of support services such as careers officers, educational psychologists and education welfare officers. They are all in the same administrative district of the county for educational purpose. And, significantly for this study, they are all deemed by the LEA to be small in scale and rural in character.

These observations lead to the speculation that where differences are found between the schools they must reflect to a very significant extent the decisions made by the schools themselves. That is, the character and quality differences will largely be attributable to the decisions made by the governors, heads and teachers over time. We are studying schools at the end of a period when most of the important decisions which create a school's ethos, for example decisions on curriculum, staff appointments, teaching style and general aims and objectives were put into the hands of the teachers in the school and particularly the head. In the future the advent of the National Curriculum, national testing and assessment procedures and national priorities for inservice training, together with the requirements for LEA curriculum policies, are evidently intended to set a common framework of objectives, methods and expected outcomes to a considerable extent. However the six study

schools and those other schools which were drawn in for the purposes of comparison, were, during the period of the study and in earlier years when outcomes now visible were being created by the processes of children moving through their school years, all to a large extent captains of their own fate. This, as we shall see, was perhaps even more the case in Hereford and Worcester than it might have been in many other LEAs because the Authority did not choose to take a strong policy line on many of the essential dimensions of schooling such as curriculum development, school review, inservice training, community education, or the design of school buildings and equipment.

There is a case to be made therefore, that the absolute levels of achievement reflect the policies of the LEA over resources invested in the schools, and the variations between schools reflect the different characters they have chosen to adopt.

Nonetheless some 'givens', factors beyond the control of the schools, are importantly different from school to school and have without doubt affected the character and performance in individual schools. This is most striking in the case of the school buildings. It would be hard to find six more heterogeneous sets of premises devoted to the purposes of secondary education in the last decade of the twentieth century. So also are the schools' histories different. Let us look at these two factors. Four of the schools were reorganised from secondary modern to comprehensive in the early 1970s and another in the later 1970s. The sixth school was reorganised from a grammar school to comprehensive school in the early 1970s and retained its VIth form (whereas the age range at the other schools is 11-16). Five of the schools had been maintained prior to 1974 by Herefordshire LEA, the sixth by Worcestershire LEA. We are therefore looking at three quite different kinds of 'history'.

None of the buildings have been reviewed and updated in any systematic way to meet their new purpose as comprehensive schools. There have been piecemeal additions over time, some connected with ROSLA, others with TVEI and yet others with the replacement of worn out HORSA huts and other temporary buildings. Indeed, more investment in the school buildings has occurred in the last two or three years and is yet planned, than occurred in the previous decade while the schools were founding themselves in their new roles as comprehensive schools. Some of the school

13

buildings have a picaresque history. One is centred on a late Victorian mansion house of no particular architectural merit. The rooms would accommodate only the small teaching groups to be found in that small school. There is no gymnasium or sports hall. The playing field is some distance away. The school itself began life as an annex to another some miles away and for many years both at the beginning of its life and more recently, has been subject to the possibility or probability of closure. The buildings at another of the schools are a heterogeneous collection accumulated on three sites by a school founded nearly four centuries ago and only brought under the aegis of the LEA this century. The stabling for horses used by pupils who came on horseback as recently as 1964 now serve as music practice rooms. Another school started life after the 1939-45 war on a former RAF camp. An undistinguished teaching block was built when it was a secondary modern school, but the sense of dispersal and separate unit buildings redolent of service camps remains. Another of the schools had no additional or converted accommodation on comprehensive reorganisation, but is now subject to a major building programme. The remaining two schools have similar 1960s origins, dating from their time as newly-founded secondary modern schools, following all-age school reorganisation. In some respects the designs are unhelpful because communication at first floor level, if some classrooms are in use, necessitates going up and down staircases which adds to both noise and time lost. At the only school to have had a full inspection by HMI (in 1983), the report drew particular attention to the inadequacies of accommodation and resource; the views expressed then support those expressed here.

The recent and planned building programmes should do much to improve the facilities at the schools concerned. There have been imaginative examples of the design of craft and technology blocks in particular. An audit of the needs of the schools in the light of current teaching space and other regulations is needed and the formulation of plans to develop the school buildings appropriately, over time.

The maintenance of the buildings has not been satisfactory. The LEA has clearly found it difficult from hard-pressed minor works allocations and capital-from-revenue funding to find the resources necessary to keep the buildings in good repair, let alone good decorative order. At the start of this study one part of one of the

14

schools had not been repainted since the late 1950s. In consequence, and with the encouragement of the Authority, the schools, usually through their Parent-Teacher Associations have undertaken a good deal of self-help redecoration and some minor adaptations.

While this has helped to improve the impression of quality and care given by the buildings, it cannot be said that they provide either teachers or children with reason for a sense of pride in the buildings in which they spend much of their working day. This is reinforced by the recently instituted arrangements for school meals, necessitated by the decision to cease to maintain the school meals service. Local contractual arrangements have replaced the service. No opportunity for social education or period of informal mingling of staff and pupils occurs. As one head put it: 'Oh, all that's hopeless now'.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

We can now bring together the findings, observations and impressions gained from the study so as to answer the questions asked by Hereford and Worcester LEA: 'Are the schools 'Educationally sound'; do they relate with their communities?' The LEA stressed that they were particularly interested in the performance of such schools generally, that is, as a group. We shall therefore consider the results for the group of six small, rural, secondary schools first and foremost. Later we shall also be able to say something about differences between schools within the group and point up findings which arise from this aspect.

The six study schools, considered as a group

1. Teaching staff

   a. *Quality of New Appointees*

   The schools are able to attract well qualified and experienced staff. One in five teachers have been replaced owing to the normal processes of promotion and retirement in the last two years and the evidence of the efforts to recruit is that there are more applicants than is common in secondary schools generally; more of the applicants have suitable experience and qualifications leading to strong short-lists; and that suitable appointments can usually be made.

   b. *Match*

   The qualifications and experience of the teaching staff in the schools are better matched to the tasks they perform than is the case in schools nationally in a significant range of subjects, namely:

   English
   Mathematics
   Science
   CDT
   Biology
   French
   Home Economics

   Staff were only slightly less well matched than the national average in the following subjects:

   Chemistry
   History
   Geography
   Music
   Art
   Physical Education

   The staff were poorly matched in the following subjects:

   Computer Studies
   German
   Religious Studies

2. Curriculum

a. *Range of subjects*

— A wide range of subjects is offered by the schools, 37 in total.

— The differences between schools were the result of individual school decisions and were not dictated by the small scale of the organisation.

— Three of the six schools offer all 10 subjects of the National Curriculum, and Religious Education, to all pupils from 11-16. These include the largest school but also two of the smallest. There is therefore no reason to suppose that schools operating at this scale will not be able to offer the National Curriculum 11-16.

This finding supports that of Halsall (1973) who conducted a careful analysis of the ability of the small comprehensive school to offer an adequate curriculum. She concluded that a two-form entry school of about 200 pupils could meet basic requirements (up to 12 subjects) up to and including 5th form level.

b. *Options 14-16*

The present option systems constrain choice of subjects in the National Curriculum for pupils aged 14-16. Most commonly between 5 and 7 subjects out of 10 are so constrained.

However, size of school is not a cause of the constraints: it is the result of individual school policies. Indeed, the larger schools, in trying to widen pupils' choice, constrain more. Policy decisions will need to be taken when the nature and requirements of the National Curriculum 14-16 are clarified. But nothing in our findings suggests that schools of this size would not be able to cope, given suitable adjustment to the range of expertise among the teaching staff and to the other learning resources.

c. There is no uniformity within the group about key dimensions of curriculum design and delivery. Staff

17

contact ratios differ as do average teaching group sizes. So does the creation and use of 'Relative Bonus'. It does not appear that the concept of 'Relative Bonus' (see Note 1) has been understood or applied consciously as a tool of curriculum design and timetabling. In consequence, the additional resources available above a national basic curriculum have not been applied to different age groups, subjects or cross-curricular themes in any planned way. There cannot therefore be any process for the review and evaluation of the different weightings of staff and other resources which are applied to different aspects and stages of the school curriculum.

Interviews with Heads and other senior staff did not lead to discussion of these and other cognate issues.

3. Examination Results

As a group, the schools are now producing results for both 'high flyers' and the 'average academic group' equal to those of both larger schools and the county average. In offering examination opportunities and achievement to a wide range of their pupils they perform better than either the larger schools or the county average over the whole five years 1983-87.

4. Pupil Destinations at 16+

a. *Entry to sixth form / 'A' level studies*

The figures as collected show that both the study schools and the larger comparator schools only rarely reach the national average of 31% of the age group entering what DES classify as sixth form/'A' level studies.

b. *Entry to sixth form / 'A' level and further education*

In view of the way in which post-16 education is made available in the county and in neighbouring post-16 establishments, this categorisation which encompasses all full-time study post-16, is more appropriate.

— The six study schools have a track record 1983-87 of a higher proportion of their pupils entering 'A' level/FE studies than other larger schools in the county. The highest performances of the study

schools equal or exceed the national average on 11 of the 24 occasions recorded.

— The 11-18 school 'outperforms' the larger, 11-18 comparator school.

c. *Entry to employment*

Generally, a larger proportion of pupils enter employment than the national average. But there are wide variations in both the study and comparator schools from year to year. This feature, of a larger entry to employment at 16+, seems to be a feature of the LEA area rather than specific to the study schools.

5. The educational careers and experience of former pupils (1978 leavers)

— 58% had entered Further Education or Higher Education, much higher than the national average (45%).

— The proportion with no qualification (12%) was close to the national average (11%).

— Those educated in the study schools as a group matched national averages at 'A' level and graduate qualifications; showed a higher propensity to enter F/HE; and showed a similar profile of work placement.

— There is, therefore, no sign that the late 1970s cohorts were disadvantaged in their subsequent attempts to gain further qualification, employment or housing.

6. Journey to school and their attendance

37% of the pupils are at school within fifteen minutes of leaving home, 79% within half an hour and all except 4% by three quarters of an hour.

Four out of five pupils in this very rural area are therefore able, on an average day, to get to school within half an hour and return in about the same time, a total of not more than one hour's travel per day. This suggests that the distribution of schools geographically and the arrangements for travel are generally satisfactory. It must be emphasised however that 20% of the pupils have a daily travel time of one and a half hours. Moreover, many pupils have to use more than one

19

mode of transport on their journeys. And for a few pupils journey times of more than two hours a day are the norm.

There would appear to be no case for adding to the financial and human cost of these journeys, which many pupils reported as tedious, uncomfortable and in some respects unpleasant.

As a group the small study schools returned the same means of attendance/absence rates as did the larger urban schools with which comparison was made. Size of schools does not therefore seem to affect attendance rates. There is however a marked individual school effect as will be noted later.

7. Suspensions and Exclusions from school

The six study schools as a group generate much less than their 'expected' (proportional) share of exclusions and suspensions. They contain 35% of the secondary school population of the division and generate,

12% of the exclusions from school
9% of the long term suspensions.
24% of the short term suspensions

When corrections are made for the nature of the catchment areas, the study group are seen to cope with potential problems without as much resort to these methods of control as is apparent in larger schools.

Some of the small schools have gained a reputation for coping with children who had rejected or had been rejected by larger, urban schools.

8. Delinquency

— Among the study schools delinquency rates vary from 1.6% to 3.5% of school population. They are not apparently related to the size of either the school or its catchment area.

— The larger, urban comparator school accounts for nearly half of the delinquency (49%) but has only 30% of the school population.

20

9. Views from the pupils

— Comments from new entrants at 11+ are very positive;

— Pupils surveyed from the 2nd, 4th, and 5th years:

76% enjoyed school 'very much' or 'quite a lot';
77% thought the school discipline about right;
66% had represented the school at sport;
81% had represented the house at sport;
28% were members of outside clubs.

These pupils had high aspirations. Only 24% wanted to finish schooling at 16+ (50%+ will). 36% wanted to go on in education beyond 20 (only about 14% will).

10. Views from parents

a. choice of school

— Parents are very concerned and active about choice of school. Movement in and out of catchment areas is from +10% to −15%.

— For the group as a whole parental choice leads to a net loss of pupils of 5%.

— But the small schools also make gains from outside their areas:

53% of these gains are from larger secondary schools within the LEA. This represents a considerable, verifiable element of parental choice.

31% of the gains are from outside the county area.

— Parents' judgements about individual schools show consistency over time.

— Parents have a sophisticated and accurate view of the size of the schools and are in touch with current educational debate about the advantage and disadvantages of smallness.

60% thought large schools offered no educational advantages;
82% thought small schools had advantages;
20% said they chose the school because it was small;
25% said they chose the school because it was local;

21

26% said they chose the school because of its reputation; only 16% said they chose the school because of its examination results.

— Heads' opinion/knowledge of the dynamics of parental choice is often not well founded in fact.

b. Relations with the school

— Nearly 90% of parents thought they had enough opportunities to talk to their child's teacher(s)

— However,

76% thought it was not easy to see the Head;
64% thought it was not easy to see the Form Teacher;
62% thought it was not easy to see the subject teachers;

when the initiative was taken by the parents, rather than offered (eg. a parents' evening) by the school.

— Less than half the parents (47%) thought they had enough information about what was taught.

— One third of parents thought that information about the curriculum was not provided.

— 40% of parents thought they did not have enough information about how to help their child(ren).

— 27% said they had enough information about books.

— 58% would like to sit in on a lesson.

— 87% thought the teachers 'approachable';

— 70% thought the teachers made you feel 'at home';

— 55% thought the teachers were 'strict';

— 75% of parents saw the schools as 'very traditional';

But only 9% thought them 'too academic'.

82% thought they were preparing the children well for the world of work:

and 90% of parents were 'very satisfied' with the schools.

11. Views from employers
    - All except one employer thought that the quality of school leavers was good or better than in the past; but most employers do not recruit directly at 16+.
    - The schools have had successful links with employers for work experience placements for a long period — 20 years in one case.
12. Views from external LEA support services and non-LEA agencies
    - Most liaison with the schools was crises-oriented. Only the Education, Welfare and Careers services reported that their relationships with the schools generally were planned and regular.
    - There is generally a lack of policy in respect of involvement of other services (Health, Social Work, Police, Probation) in the work of the schools and in home/school/service liaison.
    - Small schools were generally seen as caring establishments where individual children were well known and pupils rejected elsewhere often accommodated successfully.
    - External agencies found communication easier with small schools. Often this was because the point of contact, being the head, remained constant, while in larger schools personnel changed as the child moved through the school.
    - A disadvantage of small schools was that the school overreacted to some behaviour, because it was comparatively rare. In a larger school it would not have seemed so exceptional and the staff would have had less time to devote to the individual who would then work through the stage or crisis satisfactorily.
13. Community use of schools
    - 72% of former pupils thought the school important in the community. Their reasons were that it provided a focus for the community and that the school facilities were valuable for community use.

23

— 80% of parents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the school was important to the community.

— The facts of the community use do not permit a statement that is valid for the whole group.

Two of the schools are used by outside bodies out of school hours on 5 out of 7 days a year, and a further two in 3 out of 7 days a year. The fifth school is used one day out of 7 and the remaining school virtually not at all. At this school 40% of the parents thought it was not important in the community or had no view.

— it is significant that none of the schools appears to have had difficulty in recruiting the 'community governors' required by the 1986 Education Act, or parent governors. Compared with other parts of the country this suggests a greater willingness and availability to participate in school governance in the communities of the six schools.

The Schools as a Group — Summary

In summary, some very positive findings have emerged about the schools, taken as a group. They attract teaching staff who are well qualified and experienced. In consequence the match between teachers' qualifications and the task they perform is above the national average in a significant range of subjects and poorly matched in only three. A wide range of subjects is taught, thirty-seven in all. All schools offer the subjects of the national curriculum, though not to all pupils 14-16 because of the present option systems.

In examinations at 16+ the group are now performing as well as the county average on all three criteria examined in the study. For their academic 'high flyers' the schools' results are equal to those of the larger schools used for the purposes of comparison and better than the county average. For their 'average academic group' they perform as well as the county average. So far as offering opportunities for examination success to a very wide range of pupils, the study schools as a group have performed better than either the comparator schools or the county average every year 1983-87. Over the years 1983-87, the group have had a higher proportion of their leavers entering full-time study than other, larger schools in the

county. On about half the occasions in question they equalled or exceeded the national average.

The educational and employment experience reported by those pupils who left in 1978 shows that more of them had entered higher or further education than the national average. Their 'A' level and graduate qualifications matched national averages and they showed a similar profile of work placement. It would be difficult to argue that the pupils of the 1970s had been disadvantaged by their school education.

The location of the schools permits 80% of the pupils to reach school within half an hour of leaving home. Attendance rates were not affected by relative isolation or the difficulties of journeys to school: they were similar to attendance rates in larger, more urban schools in the county.

The schools had recourse to exclusion or suspension from school markedly less than other larger schools in the county. They also provided a smaller proportion of delinquents.

The pupils have positive views of the school on entry and high aspirations are maintained throughout school life. The large majority of pupils enjoy school and a higher proportion of them take part in school or house sport than is common in larger schools.

A significant proportion of parents take considerable trouble about the choice of school for their children. There is a loss of 5% from the total catchment area, mainly accounted for by pupils educated at Hereford and Worcester primary schools who return to their home LEA for secondary education under agreed policy arrangements. 53% of the gains made by the school are of pupils who are in the catchment area of larger, more urban schools, in the county and a further 31% come from out of county. Both sets represent a significant and positive choice by parents in favour of the schools.

Most parents thought they had enough opportunities to talk to their child(ren's) teacher. They are less happy about opportunities offered following a request to see the head or other teachers. Most parents see the school as 'very traditional', but find the teachers approachable. They are less happy about the quality and nature of information about what is taught and how they can help.

Employers thought the quality of school leavers as good as or better than in the past. The schools have long-standing arrangements with local companies to provide work experience for pupils.

25

External services see the schools as caring but crisis-oriented in their relationships with external helping agencies.

The community makes extensive use of four of the schools and 80% of parents think that the school is important or very important to the life of the community.

In the light of this 'balance sheet', it must be said that as a group the schools are at least as successful for their pupils as other schools in the Authority and are valued by their pupils, the parents and the local community. As a category therefore, the 'small rural high school' defined as an amalgam of the six schools in this group is not only educationally viable, but successful both by the standards set within the schools and against key county and national standards.

Costs

Has this been achieved at the cost of considerable additional resources invested by the LEA? The short answer is 'No'.

It has not been possible to make a sophisticated analysis of comparative unit costs at each school and in comparison with other schools because the LEA's expenditure records have not been capable of the necessary desegregation of heads of expenditure (in common with those of most LEAs: budgets have not been built up from school level but controlled to a significant extent through common heads of expenditure. The new legal requirements for formula funding, devolved school budgets and local financial management will create the data necessary to compare school with school in the future).

What can be said, on the data provided by the LEA for 1984-1988, is that only the smallest of the six schools is significantly more costly than larger, comparator 11-16 schools in the county. It has been seen that at this school the county's formula for allocating teaching staff does provide an increment not available in the other schools. This no doubt accounts for most of the additional cost. In the case of three of the other five 11-16 schools, unit costs are equal to or lower than those in the comparator 11-16 school. On average, over 4 years, they have been virtually the same. Unit costs at the 11-18 study school are about 10% higher than the average of three comparator 11-18 schools. This amounts to a 'subsidy' of about £120 per year per pupil; in the 11-16 school with the highest unit cost the subsidy is approximately £180 p.a. A proportion of this 'extra'

would have to be spent on additional transport costs if the schools were not available. The data available could not permit the LEA's officers to isolate an average cost for a pupil journey at each of the study schools because the web of transport arrangements for secondary and other pupils is so complex. But a commonsense estimate suggests that a sizeable proportion of what is now spent on providing teachers and other learning resources would have to be spent instead on transport, quite apart from the additional human costs incurred in lengthening the journeys to school (which, as we have seen are not negligible already), and the costs of making other schools larger than they already are.

The six study schools — individual characteristics

The above report about the six schools taken as a group satisfies the request made by the Authority and is all that can be said, in summary, looking at the schools from that collective standpoint. However, from the point of view of trying to understand the factors which make for success or failure in operating a school on a small scale, the *differences* between the schools that have emerged, and the individual and idiosyncratic organisations, approaches and ethos that they have adopted are much more instructive. We will now draw attention to some of these features from our findings, continuing to preserve the anonymity of the schools.

In the main narrative of this report, in analysing the results of our various enquiries and observations, we have continually drawn attention to the differences between the schools which emerged — often dramatically. It will be clear therefore that one finding of this project is that it would be an error for policy-makers to think that there is a single construct, 'the small, rural, secondary school'. In fact, these six schools are, in important respects, as different from one another as they are collectively from larger, urban schools.

These individual differences arise from two major factors which have been mentioned frequently in the report, namely the differences to be found in the nature of the communities and geographical areas they serve, and the extent to which the schools have developed individual educational philosophies which, over time, have made them radically different places in which to live and learn.

27

An example of the impact of the first factor appears if two schools are compared. The one serves a 'catchment area' of nearly 22,000 hectares consisting of scattered villages and hamlets: there is no 'community of place'. Moreover, 25% of the pupils come from beyond even this extensive area; they and their parents must have even less sense of geographical connection or community involvement. Yet this very circumstance reveals how popular the school has become with parents. The other school is located in a small market town and many of the pupils can walk to school. There is a strong sense of community of place, stimulated over time by the fact that it is a border town. The head at this school bought a house 3 miles away so as to keep his promise to move into the area. Some of the governors were utterly dismayed by the decision because they saw that village as remote and alien: indeed the school song refers to the residents there as 'foreigners'. It is futile to think of these two schools as working in a uniform medium. Unless the school management creates an appropriate relationship with these attitudes and values, the school cannot function effectively in important respects — even if part of the school's hidden curriculum is to widen the pupils' horizons and make them feel citizens of the world as well as of Lilliput. The same kind of cameo could be written for each of the other four schools, but each telling a very different story.

The influence of the second factor arises mainly because of the personality and educational philosophy of the head. Research and observation of schools emphasises the importance of the role of the head. In these schools this 'norm' of English school organisation has been reinforced by the 'hands-off' stance of the LEA and geographical isolation. In all the schools, whether the present head had been in the post for a long time (as he had in three) or was relatively new, the impact of present and former incumbents was plain to see and readily acknowledged. Our report shows again and again how the schools have adopted radically different policies (or have, consciously or unconsciously, decided to have no policy in certain respects). This means that the experience of the teachers and children and of outsiders who relate to the school is also radically different.

It will be important, as the schools enter the current phase of taking far more direction from outside over curriculum, attainment targets, inservice training and teacher appraisal, that the

valuable aspects of school individuality are not lost. Indeed they should be respected and encouraged since it will be these that stimulate the imagination and motivation which will transmute curricular statements and attainment targets into exciting teaching and learning. The school has a duty to create and publish its own curriculum statement going above and beyond national and LEA curricular requirements: and to find ways of explaining to both the Authority and its public how it monitors and measures its progress and uses the results to improve still further in the future. This process requires a subtle amalgam of outer direction and inner-directedness. The schools have been run hitherto almost entirely on the latter: in taking on the former it will be disastrous if they become homogenised.

The distance that the schools are from one another can be illustrated by describing the one which seems to have achieved the greatest coherence of purpose and action. This is not to condemn the others, since there is good in all of them and some excellent work in some. But it serves to illustrate both what can be achieved at small scale and what is still lacking in some respects elsewhere. These contrasts should also serve to remove finally any thought that the small rural secondary school is a monolithic construct.

We noted in our opening chapters that research has suggested that schools perform well or badly against all performance indicators: it is not usually the case that they can be successful in one important dimension and yet fail in others. Our research supports this conclusion. The case of one school is illustrative.

In examination results at 16+ the school out-performed or equalled comparator (large, urban) schools and the county average against all three criteria. That is, it offered the reality of high achievement to all its ability range, from 'academic high flyers' to the generality of pupils.

It did this consistently over all the six years under review. Moreover these achievements motivated pupils to go on learning, because the school also has the most consistent record of a very high proportion of 16+ leavers going in to full-time further study. That is, the children were evidently enabled to achieve well at 16+ in a way that gave them confidence to continue rather than feel over-pressurized or burnt-out.

What kind of school policies support these outcomes? We cannot know the cause-and-effect relationship of any particular element.

But a very clear and powerful ethos emerges. It is presumably, the collective effect, the school climate, which created the engine for success.

The head taught half a timetable. He did this not out of bravado, but because he believed he *should,* first and foremost, remain a teacher and part of the college of teachers in the school, and also because in that way he got to know the pupils as students as well as through other aspects of their behaviour and life in school. It was an important part of the reason he had chosen to work in a small school. Being a teacher he said, also gave him daily experience of the essential mechanism of the school — record keeping, timetabling, the adequacy of resources, the attitudes and values of colleagues. He could not be bamboozled because he knew at first hand; hence no-one ever thought of trying to bamboozle him and relationships with teachers and other adults in the school were direct and based on continual substratum of shared experience of the daily task. In consequence he was deeply respected, but not only for this reason but because he was also an effective, though undemonstrative, administrator and good at external relationships.

The staff regularly arranged to teach outside the formal timetable, in order to provide options 14-16 that could not otherwise be accommodated. In this school there were the least complaints from pupils that options they wanted could not be offered. Past pupils from this school reported more favourably than from any other on the quality of careers advice they received. Staff took up opportunities for inservice training, when offered. This was the only school in which every teacher became involved in the TRIST programme.

What kind of pastoral care and personal and social development ran parallel with this academic regime? It was the school that had little or no formal structure, believing that form teachers and senior teachers should and could accept direct responsibility in view of the small scale upon which the school operated. The pastoral care policy was not seen as 'in support of the academic work' but as having its own educational justification in promoting the personal growth of the pupils. The head knew every pupil by name and family background — a circumstance verified on sufficient accidental occasions to make it seem a justifiable claim and he expected the same of the rest of the staff and the office and other

support staff. On the other hand, pupil records of both academic and personal progress were carefully maintained and readily available to any teacher who wished to consult them. The system did not rely, therefore, on memory or chance. It appears to have worked from the point of view of the pupils, because this was the school where they reported the best rapport with teachers and said they would be willing to talk to teachers about both personal and school problems. It was not only the school where there was least bullying and fighting, it was also the school where pupils and staff shared the same perception of what was happening. It had positive policies to encourage pupils to attend school. The school also had the least resort to suspensions and exclusions from school and had the lowest delinquency rate. The school had set up a School Council some years ago, consisting of two pupil representatives from each form. It was given real work to do, and opportunities to influence school policy in ways that mattered to the pupils. For example, it was the School Council that decided there should be a school uniform, and then went on to design it. The school had appointed parents to the governing body some time before the legal requirements of the early 1980s and parents who served on the governing body seemed at ease in their role and at home with the intricacies of school policy and organisation. Interestingly, of the two parent governors serving at the relevant time one was 'local' (had attended the school herself and now had children there), the other a 'cosmopolitan' (who had moved into the area recently). Thus both kinds of community view found a voice. There was a good deal of community use of the school and a strong feeling in the locality in favour of the school.

In short, the school which achieved most academically was also the most caring and most concerned about the personal and social development of its pupils and most successful at protecting them from physical violence within school and delinquent behaviour outside it. Vandalism, rife before the head had been appointed, had been eliminated. On one celebrated occasion the head himself turned out at night and apprehended an intruder, before the police arrived.

All this was achieved by one of the smallest schools in the group. It was also the school whose unit cost most nearly equalled those of the larger, urban comparator school (the difference over the 4 years average, was only £9 per annum and is probably explained

31

by the existence of a slow learning unit). So the achievements are due to the good organisation of resources and the commitment of the staff, not the application of additional resources. There is a cautionary coda to this tale, particularly relevant as schools enter the regime of open enrolment and market forces. Parental opinion about the school, and especially about the head, was divided. The large majority strongly supported and admired, but a vociferous minority were critical. It suggests that far too little of the truth about school performance has been available in the past to avoid some opinion being based on ignorance or prejudice. It is also probably a human truth that no single regime will ever please everyone, whatever the evidence for its effectiveness, and it is essential that systems beyond the school, at the scale of the LEA, should offer appropriate support and protection when necessary.

Having sketched the characteristics of the most consistently successful school, using the criteria originally set in the opening chapter of the report, let us remind ourselves in summary form, of some of the differences between the schools that have emerged. The differences are not of a superficial and short-term kind, but refer to those aspects of schooling and its organisation which appear to affect or reveal the deep and long-term effects on children and communities. We can say this on the basis of having looked at aspects of the schools' lives and work over a range of time, effectively from 1973 (when the 1978 leavers first entered) to 1989 (employers' views) with a concentration on 1983-88 (pupil destinations and examination results etc). Education, as we have emphasised, has a long pay-off for its recipients and schools should not attempt the 'quick-fix' — it follows that their work should not be judged by superficial criteria or data drawn only from a narrow period.

Differences between schools

The schools' staffs have marked differences in the range of average age (36-46 for men, 41-50 for women) in age profile, and in average length of teaching experience (between 9 and 19 years). The match between teachers' graduate qualifications and their work varies between zero and 100% for physics, history, geography and chemistry, 38% – 80% for mathematics and 33% – 96% for English. In one school 36% of physics and in another 22% of mathematics and

32

in yet another 23% of history is taught by teachers with no recorded qualification in the subject.

In examination results against 'criterion two' (8 'O' levels), where inter-school comparisons are legitimate on the basis of the data, the performance in one year between the schools ranged from 16% – 5% of the age group reaching that standard, and over 5 years on average between 4% and 10%.

There are marked differences in the approach to pastoral care and pupil development, an area where it might be expected that schools would have developed particularly individual approaches. The consequence in the school where policies have been less than successful are worrying. Teaching staff are under considerable pressure because of anxiety and disruption among themselves and the pupils. The school with the worst record for attendance also had most recourse to exclusions. It is seen as 'closed' by outsiders, it is not used for community purposes and 40% of the parents thought it was not important to the community or did not have an opinion. It was also seen as backward in its policies by some of the pupils. We have noted generally that girls were more disadvantaged than boys in not being able to get their choice of option at 14+. At this school a girl who had chosen to work in the handicraft room at lunch time because the notice on the door said 'No boys allowed in at lunch time', wrote in her diary: 'Our school has only just introduced all crafts for both boys and girls and is way behind in many areas of modern teaching'. Another school uses the pastoral care system almost exclusively for purposes of controlling the pupils rather than helping their personal and social development. The staff typically saw PSE as only to support the academic curriculum and had the least understanding of the purposes of PSE. None of the recorded incidents of pastoral care were to praise the pupils or record success. They were punitive or regulatory. This was also the school that was seen as least 'open' by external agencies. It had the most bullying (21% of pupils reported personal experience) and also the highest incidence of 'messing about in class'. Perhaps more worrying, pastoral care staff reported very little incidence of bullying: they were evidently out of touch. Evidently, a very controlling and regulatory approach in the staff had not succeeded in creating a climate conducive to learning. The examination results were below average for the group. It was the school with the highest average age of teacher and those with

fewest qualifications gained by inservice training. Innovation of curriculum had been attempted in the school but had failed: the staff survey revealed that the staff were divided into groups holding opposing views.

The list of differences between the schools in the group generally can be extended further. Attendance rates differed by as much as 24%. Analysis strongly suggested that this was owing to in-school policy factors rather than extraneous causes such as the nature of the catchment area. In the same way, suspension and exclusion from school were used to markedly different extents and relate to school policy rather than the background or ability of children attending. The schools presented themselves differently to the parents and their other publics, some taking considerable trouble over the school prospectuses and other publicity while others appeared to treat it as relatively unimportant and in some respects did not meet minimum legal requirements. Whether as a consequence or not parents have very different views of the schools, some of which are reflected in their efforts to gain their preference for a school within the group but other than their local school. We have drawn attention to the amount of choice exercised between schools in the study area, as well as between that area and schools outside.

Thus, while the case has been made for the effectiveness of the schools considered as a group, it is also true that individual schools need seriously to consider certain aspects of their policies and work, and that the LEA should be more forthcoming in offering resources, advice and inservice training to these ends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Local Education Authority

1. The uncertainty about their future that has hung over the schools for years should be ended as soon as possible.

2. There should be a guarantee that those schools that are to remain open will not be subject to further review for at least ten years.

   Only such a period of certainty can provide the one essential element of the climate needed for an optimistic and creative approach to the changes now necessary.

3. The LEA should feel confident that schools of 2 FE or thereabouts can provide a good education for their pupils, given appropriate support.

   This is important since some schools will unavoidably be working at that scale. They should not be regarded as regrettable features of the system, but as having their own special strengths.

4. The LEA should accept that an element of additional resourcing is required by its smallest schools. The LEA should prefer to pay out public funds in the form of a direct increment for teaching and other educational resources rather in the form of additional transport costs and still larger schools elsewhere.

5. The LEA should decide and declare what role it intends to adopt towards its schools, in the new circumstances created by the 1986 and 1988 Education Acts.

   The choices lie along a spectrum, from merely providing formula funding and subsequent monitoring at one end, to creating a shared vision of educational opportunity and purpose backed up by co-operative endeavour, at the other.

   The recent County Curriculum Statement and Professional Development Handbook suggest a considered move towards the developmental approach based on shared working and responsibility. Such innovation if it is indeed intended, needs sensitive management, and must also leave room for the schools to develop their own unique characters as they 'de-

liver' not only national and county requirements, but also their own objectives and aspirations.

6. The role of the county inspectors/advisers will need particular consideration in the light of decisions taken under 5 (above).

7. The LEA should consult the other agencies and services involved with schools (notably Social Work service, Health services, Police and Probation services) and voluntary organisations so that an agreed policy over liaison and co-operative working may be formulated and implemented.

8. The report draws attention to a number of policy issues over which the Authority has not given the schools adequate direction and advice or has not kept such documents up to date. Policies on School Prospectuses, exclusions and suspensions from school, the preparation of reports for other services (such as Court Reports), and aspects of pastoral care are some examples.

9. A systematic review of the accommodation needs of the schools, against current DES regulations and the new curricular requirements should be set in hand, and used to inform a building development plan for each school.

10. The research has shown how many aspects of the work and achievements of schools may be examined rationally. Others, beyond the reach of the team, should be added to the list, notably structured classroom observation and longitudinal studies of pupil progress in a social context.

    The LEA have many of the necessary elements in place to continue this evaluative work, especially a research and statistics branch and school inspectors. In-school self-evaluation needs development. It is to be hoped that, in consultation with teachers, the momentum and interest gained by the project will not be lost.

11. The LEA should assume responsibility for providing public information about the education system in the county, based on agreed and open criteria so that the integrity of the information is assured and accepted.

To the Schools

12. Whole-school approaches to curriculum design, delivery, evaluation and review need to be instituted.

13. The Development Plan for the school should be based on this coherent approach to the whole work of the school and the requirements for organisational development and staff development which flow from it.

14. The aspects of the organisation and performance of pastoral care and the personal and social education of the pupils, through both the formal and the hidden curriculum which have been highlighted in the Report, should be given particular attention.

15. All staff, together with representatives from the Governing Body (parents and other community figures), should take part in these processes. The result should be a shared and agreed view of the school — its purposes, the ways in which it will try to meet them, and the means that will be used in judging the outcomes. Judgements made should also be used to improve objectives and methods in the future.

    The outcomes to be intended from such a whole-school approach are a sense of ownership on the part of all concerned and an enhanced professionalism in the teachers. The teachers will become not only skilled, individual practitioners, but also participating members of a co-operative of practitioners. Their work, moreover, will be judged by criteria they have helped to create.

16. In most of the schools and in all the schools in some respects there is an urgent need to extend the range and style of the means by which pupils are helped to learn. In particular, more individual learning and small group work should be developed, not least because they challenge the habit of dependence on the teacher and avoid the tyranny of the imposed meaning. A far larger proportion of the pupils, over a much wider range of subjects, could be involved in individual and group projects using study skills that would introduce them more effectively to the personality of knowledge and the privilege of thinking for oneself. The evident liveliness of the children and their commitment to schooling cry out for them

37

to be given more opportunity to plan, regulate and evaluate their own work.

17. Attention should be paid to creating a public image of the school which is rounded and based upon the agreed objectives and methods, and the outcomes they lead to. The quality of public information and its integrity will assume even greater significance in the future.

18. The schools should continuelly pay attention to understanding more fully and to pursuing those aspects of their smallness of scale which have positive benefits for the children, so that every ounce of additional value potentially within their situation, may be realised.

In this way, anxiety will be replaced by pride.

Part II — Policy Issues

The enquiry into the six small, rural secondary schools throws an interesting light on a number of policy issues.

- Is it mistaken to contend, as DES have, that the secondary school with fewer than 600 pupils can be effective only at unacceptable costs?
- What unexamined assumptions lie beneath the notions that are used to judge school effectiveness, especially in recent work on performance indicators?
- What meanings are attached to the notion of the relationship between a school and its community? Have they been radically affected by open enrolment and the market in schools?
- What public values are the schools being asked to pursue at a time of both national curricula and market forces? Do they imply a pluralism and fragmentation such that any single model of the Effective School (and therefore any set of performance indicators, etc) can have no meaning in the case of any individual school?

  To put it in abstract but not entirely irrelevant language, have we, however inadvertently, exchanged the world of Platonic forms for Heidegger's existentialism? And if that were true how piquant an outcome it might be deemed from an ultra-conservative period.

I propose briefly to unpack each of these propositions, using the kind of experience and insight gained from working on the research project. They are no more than reflections on work in progress but may be of interest to policy makers and those who have a duty to judge and report on schools.

The discussion will also raise a number of other policy considerations, within these four broad categories. They include:

- treating small schools as a homogeneous group is inappropriate;
- the importance of the LEA's historical policies, and the geographical, economic and social context to the judgement(s) made about school viability;
- the value weighting to be given to different factors in any list of characteristics contributing to school effectiveness;
- the important difference between discerning factors making for effectiveness and strategies for school improvement;
- The school catchment area, vacillating annually, as a market and the notion of the school's community.
- the apparent similarity between 'locals' and 'incomers' in rural areas in respect of their attitudes to education compared with the differences between them reported in respect of other social issues.

1. The case against the small secondary school — not proven?

So far as I know, the Hereford and Worcester study was the first attempt in the UK to look at the effectiveness of secondary schools having a pupil roll 11-16 in the ranges 180-450. That is, from 1 FE to 3 FE. The average size of the five schools at the centre of controversy was under 300, ie. 2 form entry.

As the summary in Part 1 above makes clear all these schools and some outstandingly, performed adequately or well against the criteria set. They offered a range of subjects including those in the national curriculum, attracted appropriately qualified teachers, produced examination results at 16+ as good as or better than the larger urban comparator schools and the county as a whole, had less recourse to suspension and exclusion, their pupils were less involved in delinquency out of school and elected to stay on beyond 16 in education and training in higher proportions than county or national averages. The pupils, present and past, generally liked their schools and parents thought teachers accessible and appropriately 'strict'. Parents would have liked more information about

the schools and more opportunity for participation which taken with their vigilance and vigour over choice of school at 11+, strongly suggest that the mixture of 'incomers' and 'locals' who constituted the parent body were as least as knowledgeable and active as parents are encouraged to be in other kinds of community often thought to be more politically active.

If this general picture is true, and represents at least the outline of the kind of school most professionals and parents would say was effective, then there must be a strong presumption against any dogmatic national policy which rules that all schools of less than 600 should be closed. As one civil servant working in an area of the UK with many small secondary schools observed, 'The research puts the small secondary schools right back in the centre of professional and political debate, whereas for twenty years the case has been regarded as closed'.

Having myself worked in this climate for those twenty years I admit I approached the research with a subconscious assumption that I would find impoverishment in important respects. As I worked on the results of various analyses and surveys it reminded me strongly of the feeling an historian gets when working on hitherto unknown archives: the findings build up within your mental world and form new and unexpected configurations.

Since the smaller secondary school attracts good teachers (who prefer to put their effort into teaching rather than control) and is liked by pupils and parents for its human scale, the question should at least be asked whether a reversal of 40 years of policy should not be contemplated in appropriate circumstances. Why not devolve secondary education into smaller units in rural and semi-rural areas, rather than continue unquestionably to pursue a policy of urban concentration of larger schools? Logically, transport costs should not be significantly greater. The urban child would experience detachment from his or her 'home community' rather than the rural child. Again, logically, there is no obvious reason for preferring one course more than the other. If so, the balance sheet is determined by other advantages of the small rural school, revealed in this study.

However, the strongest of warnings needs to be registered lest any euphoria should develop. The research shows only that small can be effective. It emphatically does not show that it always or inevitably is. The conditions, minimum conditions, that have to be

41

satisfied include: (1) Leadership of a high order, probably needing to be more inspired and dedicated than in larger schools where there is depth in senior management; (2) Dedication among teaching and other staff 'beyond the bond': that is, a willingness when necessary to work beyond contractual obligations (not apparently affected by the imposition of national conditions of service, which occurred during the course of the study); (3) Additional finance, equipment and staff beyond mere averages, to compensate for smallness of scale. It seems in the case of Hereford and Worcester that these additional costs were not greater than what would have to be spent on transporting the pupils to schools further afield, and in extending those schools. But this must be a function of the particular circumstance: an extremely scattered population and relative parsimony historically in the policies of the LEA. These assumptions and conditions would need careful testing in every other case, unless the LEA or government thought the other non-material advantages of the small school outweighed the additional costs.

The present policy stance of the DES is disingenuous, some might say deceitful. The relatively firm line taken earlier (and reinforced by the Audit Commission) was much modified by DES Circular 3/87; yet the criteria for DES approval of the LEA formula for delegated school budgets preclude, in the opinion of many LEAs (including Hereford & Worcestershire), the opportunity to provide the additional support needed by the small secondary school.

The tone for the 1980s was set in DES Circular 2/81, 'Falling Rolls and Surplus Places'. It was based on the HMI national primary and secondary surveys. As summarised in *Better Schools*, 'the advice was that... 11-16 comprehensive schools of less than five forms of entry required levels of staffing and other resources which were more generous than the average'. *Better Schools* (Cmnd 9469) in 1965 went subtly further:

> 'an 11-16 comprehensive school of five or less forms of entry is unlikely, without disproportionately generous staffing, to be able to offer to the whole range of its pupils a curriculum appropriately broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated, and delivered through a sufficient number of teaching groups'. (Para 275 (3), p.80)

That is, whereas fewer than 600 on roll was inadequate from 1981-1985, after 1985 fewer than 750 represented vulnerability. (It was in this period that Hereford & Worcester LEA brought forward their proposals for rationalisation and then asked Warwick University to conduct the enquiry.)

However, the national policies of devolved school budgets and open enrolment then emerged strongly. It became clear to DES ministers and officials that they offered a method of creating a climate ill disposed to small schools which both avoided the necessity for the DES to have a rigorous policy about size and avoided the discomfort of ministers having to pronounce on disputed proposals for the closure of schools. The formula for school budgeting could ensure that additional resources were not given to small schools and the market would indicate beyond peradventure that the school should close.

Hence DES Circular 3/87 'Providing for quality: the pattern of organisation to age 19', which states that the general guidelines on minimum numbers contained in *Better Schools* are 'not to be interpreted as narrowly prescriptive', and are not to be regarded as 'benchmarks for the closure of schools'. Size is in itself not to be regarded as a determinant of the quality of a school: 'there are good and bad schools of all sizes'. The then Secretary of State said that LEAs should 'take account of wider considerations such as denominational choice; local geography; the distances to be travelled to alternative schools in the event of closure; and the ages of the children making these journeys'. ('Mr. Baker abandons numbers formula', *Education* 8 May 1987, p.406).

The conclusion presses in that the present state of national policy may be seen as satisfactory if the underlying argument of Circular 3/87 is accepted that 'small schools incur disproportionately high unit costs on staffing if they are to sustain quality' and the operation of the market, which can mean arbitrary and lingering death for schools to the disadvantage of those in them, is regarded as a better mechanism than local planning and consultation. However, it is not immediately obvious that this mechanism will lead to any better educational provision, taken as a whole or area by area, than the earlier system of devising and consulting upon School Development Plans, whatever its shortcomings or political inconvenience.

43

A glance at the DES's record since 1944 is not encouraging. Circular 144 (1947) recommended a minimum entry of 300-500 pupils (i.e. a school of 1,600-1,700). Circular 10/65 recommended a minimum entry of 180-200 pupils and envisaged 11-18 schools with a roll of over 2,000. And we have seen that, in the 1980s Circular 2/81 recommended an entry of 120, Better Schools 150, and Circular 3/87 has it all ways, since policy control had adopted other means. Those left with responsibilities in schools and LEAs understandably feel exposed and unsupported.

The policy question is fundamental and enduring and potentially affects about a third of all our secondary schools. Is policy to be mainly determined by financial considerations or by the quality of educational provision? The new factor is that a market system, combined with tight financial control from central government can side-step the question of quality by constructing the market in such a way that the choice, which many might wish to make, of a smaller, high quality higher cost school, cannot arise.

2. School Effectiveness, Performance Indicators and all that

I have hinted at the fragility of the notion of the Effective School. Chapter Two of the Report reviews the present state and recent history of what can be thought of as the 'school effectiveness movement', the 'school improvement movement' and the search (virtually futile so far) for a single neat and quantifiable set of 'performance indicators'.

Underlying all this is one model or another of a 'Good School' (the term chosen by HMI in 1977 when they published one of the first essays in the genre). Frequently the assumptions upon which the model is based are unstated and unexamined. Critical review of some of the work in the field suggests that some models contain contradictory or self-cancelling assumptions. Still other work appears to have no coherent model underlying it, only a pragmatic selection of indicators.

In the Report I tried to show some of the models that appeared to be in use and unequivocally stated my own, reiterated above, so that critics could work from first principles. However, a number of issues of importance to policy makers both within schools and outside them cannot be disposed of in the present state of the art. The following stand out from the Hereford and Worcester Report:

— The 'checklists' of virtuous characteristics of schools to be found in say the COSMOS papers or *Secondary Schools: An Appraisal* (HMSO, 1988) contain no value judgements or weightings. They are offered as if they all had equal valency. The point can be illustrated by quoting the 'checklist' derived by Alan Sanday from the many available:

'Schools are likely to be more effective if:

- — the school has a development plan which engages the support of staff without overloading them
- — there is collaborative planning
- — heads and senior staff are involved in curriculum discussions and influence the content of guidelines without exerting total control over the rest of the staff
- — the work of teachers is monitored supportively and there is a school-wide programme of staff development
- — the school has a degree of autonomy in the allocation of its resources
- — learning time within the school day and within lessons is maximised
- — sessions are organised round one or at most two curriculum areas/topics
- — the work is structured by the teacher so that there is an organised framework within which there is a variety of activity. This will include a significant proportion of time for teacher communication with the whole class (which provides the best opportunity for high order communication) as well as group and individual work in which pupils have the opportunity to learn how to organise their own studies
- — staff expectations of pupils are high, and pupils' work is carefully monitored so that they receive frequent positive feed-back and praise
- — parents are involved with their children's learning'. (Sanday, 1990)

All of these have an immediate intuitive appeal. However, all of them would require one or more value judgements in those undertaking the monitoring. Some seem to lie beyond the scope of any conceivable monitoring system: for example what evidence would be collected, regularly and reliably, to show whether 'parents are involved with their children's learning'? The conclusion presses in that even where lists of desirable school characteristics can be agreed, the interpretive skills and mental set of those analysing and reporting the data will effect the judgements significantly.

— Performance indicators necessarily relate to the objectives of the school. Thus even were they to be agreed and reliable they would push the substantive argument one stage further back, to whether the purposes proposed for and by the school remained valid. Performance indicators of their nature suggest a static view of education and school processes and purposes. Yet policy, including the attempt to enlarge the areas of public accountability which performance indicators are specifically intended to serve, is in many respects encouraging a dynamic, responsive, interactive approach. Schools — their governing bodies and teachers — are supposed to take account of the 'market', that is the currently expressed wishes of the consumers (parents and, on a few models, the pupils also). Is the conclusion that established performance indicators, used by policy makers unavoidably some time — often a considerable time — *after* the performance to which they refer has occurred, can only relate to the 'permanent' features of schools? If so, what are these? National curriculum and staying on rates for example? Is the partitioning of judgements about school performance and effectiveness that is implied desirable? We shall return to the conflict between central direction and market forces in another respect later.

— Meanwhile, another issue arising from judgements about school effectiveness should also be noted. The context which loosely links effectiveness, improvement and accountability in the public mind is a dangerous one. Few studies have tried at the same time both to establish criteria for effectiveness and strategies for intervention

in order to achieve greater effectiveness (eg. Mortimore et al. *School Matters*, 1988). Still less has there been any rigorous evaluation of such procedures as have been proposed. In consequence, the policy maker should eschew any naive assumption that an 'audit' of any school would also, in the present state of the art, produce obvious and easily implemented strategies for desirable change. Certainly, the lesson from the study of these six schools, apparently similar in so many ways, is that carefully devised, individual programmes for improvement based in similar principles but requiring differing emphases and approaches, are needed for each separate school. The conclusion presses in that the most robust long-term strategy would be the empowering of those working in the schools to monitor themselves rigorously and undertake their own improvement, against declared criteria. External professional and lay scrutiny could then be applied to the process, again according to agreed criteria. This thought will also recur later, approached from a different standpoint.

— Meanwhile, it may be noted that the publication of the Report has had the effect of dramatically energising the schools. They have evidently found, in their differing ways, the subjects and method of enquiry of interest (sometimes novelty) and have taken on the proposals for action by the schools with eagerness and enthusiasm. Such an outcome would in itself justify the work: but the general point is that human communities, like human individuals, respond positively if serious attention is paid to them. The policy question is how resources may be found, in a routine way, to provide this level of appropriate attention — that which encourages rather than stultifying through criticism. We return to the issue in the conclusion to this paper.

47

3. The School in its social context — a bankrupt notion?

The second research question posed by Hereford and Worcester LEA concerned how far the schools and their local communities interacted; but it was agnostic as to whether, if it was found that they did interact, that might be a good thing for either partner.

The findings, like other aspects of the report, demolish the notion of a monolithic paradigm of the 'small rural school'. The schools were as radically different from one another in respect of their relationship with the local community as they were in all other respects.

The report reviews briefly the differing interpretations of community now on offer. 'Community of place', although it is the dominant implied community of importance to schools in most policy thinking is not paramount. 'Communities of interest', which can pursue their purposes regardless of place through modern communications technology are at least as important, especially when considering traditional ideas of the rural school as a base for adult and community education. The communities around all the schools showed a marked mixture of 'locals' and 'incomers' (or 'cosmopolitans'). There was some evidence, which ought to lead to other research studies, that conflicts of interests between these two groups were less apparent in matters of their children's education than has been found generally (where for example incomers may want to preserve what they see as the rural idyll and locals want better — which can mean more urban-style — services).

Another marked difference between the schools derived from the geographical basis for the local community. Two of the schools were based in market towns and served nucleated communities. Here the contrast between the 'townies' and the rural fringe dwellers was marked. Other schools served areas where the pattern of settlement had hardly changed since Celtic times. There were no towns and hardly any villages, only hamlets and single dwellings. It was essential to bear these differences in mind and it would be unreasonable to expect similar patterns or extent of community interaction with the schools in such differing contexts.

The general conclusion of the research findings into the social and economic structure of the 'school communities' is that the social and economic networks are every bit as complex in deeply rural areas as they are in towns. The schools, in relating to them, face just as great a challenge. Any cosy notions of simple, direct

and easily-forged and maintained relationships, if anyone still harbours them, should be abandoned.

Another of the research findings relating to the adult community 'served' by the school has relevance for the new context of open enrolment, market forces and local financial management. It might have been expected that in deeply rural areas with transport rudimentary and expensive and schools some distance apart, parents would settle for the local school when their children became 11. It is not the case.

We studied the movement of the 11+ pupils in catchment areas of the six schools over five years. Each year something like one quarter of them entered a school which was not their designated local school, a figure that appears to be high. Moreover, this was the pattern in a period when a change in school choice required a written application and full justification to the LEA. (That was the policy stance: in fact half the number were dealt with informally by parent and school and of those who did write to the District Office, one third offered no justification. A salutary tale for educational administrators).

The general picture emerging from this study of parental choice is of considerable activity, vigilance, and determination on the part of parents and a laissez-faire approach by both schools and LEA. The results were that some schools significantly lost from their catchment area but were unaware of the fact. Others gained but were not aware of why parents preferred them. The LEA had a rich data source about parental preferences but made no use of it in policy analysis. Again, therefore, parents in communities in this remote rural area were behaving more like parents generally than according to any rural stereotype.

An interesting and topical policy question which follows is what these findings may suggest for the impact of open enrolment and the promotion of competition between schools. The findings, in so far as they are counter-intuitive, suggest a group of schools already seen by parents as alternatives and having exiguous links with their communities of place (and in some cases where there is no adult education programme with local communities of interest also). It seems possible that the impact of open enrolment may be less than would be expected because a good deal has already occurred. Analysis showed that the community generally had a high proportion of the middle class. That together with the rural

49

tendency for more families to own two cars makes the penalty of having to pay the transport costs of an out-of-zone choice of school less onerous for a larger proportion of families. The other side of the coin is the requirement that teachers and governors (including governors recruited on a local territorial basis) should be more prominent in setting the aims of the school, managing its processes and monitoring and reporting the outcomes. There are at least two issues here, assuming a post-open enrolment context in which children (and therefore parents) have been drawn in regardless of community of place and on an annual, vacillating, basis. First, how realistic or desirable is it for schools to trim their policies regularly (? annually) to meet the expressed wishes of a shifting parental constituency? Second, what is the balance to be struck between these local demands and those of central government and LEA? The larger question then also presses in. Namely, what set of public values are the schools being asked to pursue, post-1986 and 1988 Education Acts? Is the dominant ethos to be attention to the centrally regulated aspects, National Curriculum and Assessment, financial stringency, school development plans, teacher appraisal and others? Or is the fundamental notion that of the market, which implies nurturing differences rather than similarities, so as to have a unique product to sell when parents make their choices?

If the main criterion of choice is 'effectiveness' then, assuming public information were appropriate and adequate, there would be no 'market', only a public apprehension based on publicised data, of how 'good' the schools were at 'delivering' the National Curriculum. If however, parents are really interested in matters well beyond this, which can be conceived of as 'The Whole Curriculum' then the attitudes and values promoted by the school will become significant and possibly pre-eminent in the choices made. It raises interesting research questions. The Hereford and Worcester study strongly suggests that parents consider much more than the academic curriculum.

The interesting feature of the six schools studied was that for a generation at least the LEA had pursued a 'hands off' policy so that curriculum, organisation and the overall purposes and ethos in each school had been almost completely determined internally. It looks as though parents were aware of this and many responded to the differences by active choices. But as the schools were being studied, the era of self-determination was coming dramatically to

50

an end. All the schools were acutely aware of new forces that would require their conformity, and thus greater similarity with one another and in consequence more likelihood that they would all be judged by the same criteria (as yet unclear).

The issue confronting policy makers and educational administrators is whether a balance of common and unique features is what is to be pursued in schools in future. And, if it is, what strategies of government and management are most likely to achieve it and how is the evidence to be identified, collected and assessed; and by whom?

4. Conclusion

That thought brings the argument back to the question of the meanings to be attached to school effectiveness and what performance indicators are to be used.

The Hereford and Worcester study involved only six schools. It employed three broad research strategies, quantitative analysis, survey by semi-structured questionnaires, and opinion gathering.

It covered a time horizon at its extremes of 15 years of the life of the schools. It gathered material from inside the schools and LEA and from individuals and agencies outside, including statutory authorities, voluntary organisations and employers. It took over two years to complete by a team of four working in the main on a part-time basis. Yet it included very little observation of classroom activity and little of the outcomes of pupil learning other than those revealed by public examination results, generalised behaviour and attitudes, and the propensity to further study. It costs about £50,000 at 1987 prices, plus the salary of the seconded teacher.

The lesson must surely be that enquiries of this kind could not be contemplated for all schools on a regular bias, no matter how interesting the findings and however possible it would be to go on refining and extending the techniques of enquiry.

In other words, there is a real danger that most schools, for most of the time, will be judged superficially. The 'surprises' emerging from the Report make the point. So too, does the considerable rate of turnover of staff noticeable in the schools during the period of the project. In many important respects the report is recounting work done by teachers who have already moved on: the analysis needs to be reconstructed by those now in post. The search during

the 1980s for a simple set of quantitative performance indicators represented an extreme form of the danger of superficial judgement, which now appears to have receded. But, as the new style governing bodies and LEAs try to carry out their new responsibilities for monitoring and reporting educational performance, the problems are merely reconfigured, not removed.

The conclusion that the Hereford and Worcester experience would suggest is that schools must be helped to be responsible for their own development: self-criticism, monitoring, reporting and re-analysis of purposes and methods in the light of these processes. Some of the earliest programmes of school evaluation followed the internal, 'self criticism' route. They ran into difficulties and eventually disrepute partly because the initial analysis of what should be monitored and how was not sufficiently rigorous, and partly because 'outsiders' such as LEAs, or consultants or researchers were not involved enough to give wider credibility to the process and the outcomes. Where the balance and greater rigour were more nearly achieved, the outcomes proved to be the more robust. The 'Curriculum 11-16' project 1977-83 by HMI, 5 LEAs and 40 schools would be an example. If LEAs and their schools can now agree the methods of evaluation to be used and the division of labour between those outside the school and those within it and the degree of reliability to be attached to the results, progress will be possible and the work may not impede the essential requirement that schools are first and foremost places for teaching and learning. Studies such as *Curriculum 11-16*, *School Matters: The Junior Years*, and *Small, Rural and Effective* give clear indications of how these programmes may be developed.

52

Note 1 — Relative Bonus. Since this term, which derives from HMI *Cosmos* work, may not be familiar to all readers the following is an extract from *Cosmos Working Papers* (1986) pp. 18-19.

4.10 **Fundamental Relationships**

There is a fixed relationship between the number of periods per week (W), the number of teacher periods (P), the contact ratio (C) and the number of teachers available (T), which permits calculations to be made from several starting points.

i. If the number of teachers is fixed, and the cost of a curriculum pattern has been determined, the contact ratio needed to staff this curriculum can be calculated by:

$$C = \frac{P}{WT}$$

Acceptable variation in the contact ratio is a matter for negotiation between head and staff. The task is that of achieving a satisfactory balance between the requirements of the curriculum and the retention of an acceptable amount of non-teaching time.

ii. In order to staff a pre-determined curriculum using a fixed contact ratio, the number of teachers required can be calculated by:

$$T = \frac{P}{WC}$$

This is often the approach used in curriculum-led staffing, where the requirements of a previously agreed curriculum and the determination of an acceptable contact ratio led to the calculation of the number of teachers needed.

iii. Given a fixed number of teachers and a predetermined contact ratio, the number of periods available for teaching a curriculum can be calculated by:

$$P = CWT$$

In this situation, the extent of the curriculum is determined by two forms of staffing constraint.

4.11 Basic Provision (Main school only)

This is defined as the number of teacher periods (P) required to teach Z pupils in average class sizes of 27 for the week.

$$\text{Basic} = \frac{WZ}{27}$$

Such provision occurs when, for example, a first year class of 30 pupils is taught as a group for most of the week and sub-divided into two sub-groups for the rest of the week. It should be emphasised that there is nothing right or wrong about basic provision; it is a convenient yardstick against which to measure the provision actually made. It is analogous to the use of sea level as a base from which to measure land heights.

Stage 7 In the first year there are 150 pupils and the basic provision is $\frac{40z}{27} = \frac{40 \times 150}{27} = 222.2$ teacher periods.

This calculation is carried out for each year in the main school.

4.12 Bonus

This is the difference between the actual provision and basic provision and is measured in teacher periods. It is usually positive, but can be zero, or negative when the actual provision falls short of basic.

Stage 8 For the main school:

The *actual provision* is 1500 teacher periods.

The *basic provision* is $\frac{853 \times 40}{27} = 1263.7$ teacher periods.

The bonus is actual provision - basic provision = 1500 - 1263.7 = 236.3 teacher periods.

This is a measure of the amount of manoeuvre in deploying teaching resources in the main school. The amount of the bonus and its distribution among the year groups of the main school (each calculation by the same method) is of considerable importance.

4.13 Relative Bonus

Where the sizes of year groups differ considerably the amounts of bonus can give a false impression if care is not taken in their interpretation. In such cases it may be helpful to take the size of the year group into account, and this is most easily done by expressing the bonus as a percentage of the basic.

Stage 9

$$\text{Relative bonus} = \frac{\textit{Actual Bonus}}{\textit{Basic provision}} = 100\%$$

For the main school,

$$\text{relative bonus} = \frac{236.3}{1263.7} \times 100\% = 18.7\%$$

For the first year, actual provision = 267 teacher periods.

$$\text{Basic provision} = \frac{150 \times 40}{27} = 222.2 \text{ teacher periods.}$$

Bonus = 267 - 222.2 = 44.8 teacher periods.

$$\text{Relative bonus} = \frac{44.8}{222.2} \times 100\% = 20.2\%$$

4.14 The completed Staff Deployment Form follows.

55

A response by Professor Peter Mortimore

Institute of Education, University of London

I first wish to compliment the research team for tackling such a difficult policy-related research project. I also commend the Local Education Authority (LEA) on their farsightedness in commissioning the research. Not all LEAs welcome facts, especially when these may disturb policies. My own experience as an LEA officer attempting to work with the reality of school reorganisation — a topic frequently highly charged with emotion — showed me how important it is to agree the factual basis with all concerned. In my experience one can live with different interpretations and different policy options but, unless there is a basic agreement about the underlying facts, it is difficult to get past the first post. I welcome, therefore, the evidence provided for the study by Professor Tomlinson and his colleagues on the vexed question of the relationship of school size to school effectiveness.

Of course, such a question does not only apply to schools — as a general policy issue it applies to many other institutions as well. The question of size — 'small is beautiful' versus 'economy of scale' — is an issue which is also being debated in higher education, hospital management and the business world.

My plan is not to talk in detail about the individual schools used in the study but rather to attempt to lay out the criteria that I think are appropriate for this type of policy-related research before commenting, briefly, on the work as a whole and discussing each of the major recommendations. These recommendations will be discussed in relation to four theoretical positions concerned with the relationships of research to policy.

The criteria for policy-related research are fairly obvious and, in a sense, may appear trivial. Many other criteria could be envisaged.

> Policy-related research should take account of other work in the field.
>
> Adequate time should be allowed for the collection and interpretation of evidence:
>
> It should include analysis of cost-effectiveness, but should be based on educational criteria:
>
> Recommendations should be based on sound analyses, using technically appropriate methods and be underpinned by appropriate evidence:
>
> The project should be written up and disseminated in user-friendly form:
>
> Theory should be used if it aids understanding of the issues.

The Study

This study is very impressive, it meets most of my six criteria. It is based on large-scale data collection, carried out over a number of years, drawing on a mix of qualitative and quantitative information from a wide range of sources. The respondents consisted of students, parents, teachers and others from the wider community. The research term constructed a variety of measures concerned with examination results, rates of staying on, the school curriculum, suspension rates, delinquency data, teacher qualifications and, what the research team call, their match, the views of parents and the long term impact of schooling on students. The sample was carefully selected and a comparison group (not a control group in a technical sense but a very useful group of similar schools differing only in size) was established.

In addition, the research team drew on national statistics where these existed. The one limitation to the study's methodology is the lack of analysis dealing with what is known as the 'value added' component. Whilst, technically, this is difficult to undertake, its inclusion would have enabled the research team to have greater confidence in their subjective interpretations of the effectiveness of these schools. Overall, however, in my judgement, this is an impressive study which has used careful and rigorous methods.

The Policy Option — Recommendations for LEAs

Eighteen recommendations have been made. Eleven of these are addressed to the LEA. First, the research team make a clear recommendation that the uncertainty about the future of these schools should be ended. Any threat hanging over a school can be devastating. Many of us have seen schools where threat has existed for some time and we have observed how distracting this situation is for everyone who works there. It is clear that, all too often, educational developments have to take second place to the expression of concern about the future of jobs. We know how de-motivating this situation is for the teachers and support staff and, inevitably, for the students who have these teachers as their models. I appreciate that this view has to be balanced against the educational and economic arguments of any school reorganisation. But, in fairness to all those involved in the school, debilitating uncertainly should be ended.

The second recommendation, that there should be a guarantee of no further review for ten years, is similarly powerful. Stability for planning is essential in order to obtain that commitment of staff which, in turn, acts as a guarantee to generations of students that they will at least reach the age of 16 in the one school. For the individual students, this may be important but, as is widely recognised, LEAs are seldom free agents and it is important that the Authority should only agree to what it can deliver. At a time of pressures emanating from the community charge and from legislation permitting the opting out of individual schools from the LEAs, this freedom may be very limited.

The next recommendation on which I wish to comment (number 4) is that LEAs should accept responsibility for the extra resourcing required to support schools of such a small size. It must be noted, however, that the LEA in question is not renowned for its high level of educational spending. In other Authorities, where there is a tradition of higher spending, the volume of extra resources might have been more difficult to identify. I was struck by Professor Tomlinson's comments that, in fact, the size of the subsidy was the equivalent of what would have had to be devoted to the transport costs involved in transferring pupils to other schools, if the decision had been taken to close the three small schools.

The fifth recommendation, that the LEA needed to switch from being a reactive to a proactive body with a shared vision of co-operation and collaboration, is surely right. The only question is whether, under the changes introduced by the latest Education Act, LEAs have the power to take on such a role.

The sixth recommendation in the report concerns clarification of the role of inspectors and advisors. Such clarification would provide a welcome relief for many inspectors and advisors who currently, feel confused as to what their new roles should be. Such a recommendation would represent good value for money if it enabled expensive resources to be used more effectively. My only question is whether it is possible, when opting out is encouraged and LMS and the formula associated with the local management of schools means that budgets will be tightly controlled.

The seventh policy recommendation, that the LEA act as an agency in planning and co-operation, is incontestable. For many years lack of co-operation has been a major weakness of LEAs' functioning. There is bound to be a certain amount of duplication of effort by various public authorities but it should be possible to prevent major gaps in provision from occurring. Yet the Maria Colwell affair, where a child who was being seen by many different agencies, slipped through the net of care and died in tragic circumstances, has been repeated on a number of occasions.

The eighth recommendation — a need for policy guidelines to be prepared by LEAs on the use of the school prospectus, codes for suspensions, writing of court reports and so forth — is also important. It is clear from research (including that carried out by the ILEA Freedom of Information Inquiry, that Professor Tomlinson chaired) that there is too much variety in such matters between schools. Clear guidelines could save headteachers' time and ensure fairer treatment for pupils and their parents.

The review of accommodation needs (Recommendation 9) by LEAs is also an important task. Vital, too, is the support for school self evaluation (Recommendation 10). I am convinced that, of all the ways to help or to attempt to improve or to change schools, this is likely to be the most effective. People inside an institution have to want to change it. They can be so much more powerful in operating the system than are outsiders . This is not to say that there is not also a role for outside agents but that this has to be one of supporting and encouraging rather than initiating. The real

changes in any institutions come from the inside (both bottom-up and top-down). I recently heard Professor Michael Fullan, from the University of Toronto, commenting on school change. He reported how encouraging the last few years had been in terms of research, which showed that schools could change. But he also stressed that this task was not easy and that it took a long time (Fullan, 1991).

The Policy Option: Recommendations for Schools

The twelfth recommendation, that a whole school approach to curriculum design, delivery, evaluation and review is accepted, is most timely. This approach can be easier with a small staff but, as will be widely known, these things do not happen automatically. In a pluralistic society the staff group, even in very small schools, may be made up of radically different individuals with different politics, unions and attitudes to pupils. One of the greatest challenges of school leadership must be to cope with this diversity and from it to be able to nurture a strong, united staff.

The thirteenth recommendation, that development plans are needed, is important, because a realistic view of where the school is must be an essential prerequisite to where the head and staff wish it to go. Such a development plan will have to contain the goals to which they wish to aspire, and the criteria which will be used to enable the staff to recognise achievement when it occurs. Educationalists who know Hargreaves' and Hopkins' work on the implementation of School Development Plans will know that such work is not easy (Hargreaves, 1991). Hargreaves and Hopkins found that heads anticipated that the writing of the plan would be a very difficult task. In fact, the research shows that it often proved simpler than expected. At the same time, management was often seen as the exclusive preserve of the senior management team, not the whole staff. Furthermore, there was often very little agreement both on the definition of quality and on the levels of the implicit criteria to be used in judging progress.

The fourteenth recommendation to schools, on the need for an emphasis on pastoral and personal and social education, recognises that academic and pastoral needs are not in conflict but are two sides of the same coin of pupils' development.

Staff development — the fifteenth recommendation — is again essential. A great deal of research from many different countries in the world shows that shared ownership is crucial to improving a school.

The sixteenth recommendation — for an extension of the recognition of different learning styles and different methods of teaching — is also worth supporting. Some teachers still do not recognise sufficiently the range of learning strategies that pupils can use in order to achieve. In many walks of life there is a tendency to throw out babies with their bath water and to shift too radically from one extreme practice to another. The middle course is often the most appropriate form of action. Unfortunately, the media sometimes stresses the differences and polarises views quite unnecessarily, as we have seen recently in the treatment of the reading standards debate.

Recommendation 17 deals with creation of school images. The researchers recognise that the image of a school needs to be valid and that the public relations method adopted needs to be sound. It almost goes without saying that schools need to have whole-school policies if they are to have consistency between teachers. They need to promote parental involvement and they need to have high expectations for the work of their students. If they achieve these, then they can build the public relations work on a sound base. It is dangerous, in my view, in an ever more competitive system, for headteachers to concentrate more on the public relations aspects than on the underlying quality of the school.

The final (eighteenth) recommendation deals with the need for schools to recognise the value of smallness. It makes a great deal of sense to turn a perceived problem into a celebrated virtue. It is essential, though, to be able to demonstrate the advantages of smallness: more and better school policies, greater staff consistency in approach, higher expectations for known rather than unfamiliar students, closer co-ordination between colleagues, more unified learning demands, closer whole-school relations, faster and more efficient administration, closer community links.

I support these aspirations wholeheartedly but have to note that giving a high profile to the smallness of any school also carries a risk. The benefits have to be demonstrated clearly as, otherwise, the vulnerability of the school will have been highlighted unnecessarily.

Drawing on some of the research with which I have been associated (Mortimore, et al. 1988), it has been shown that small primary schools can be slightly easier to be made effective. Smallness is not a guarantee but, rather, a facilitating factor. Not all research, of course, supports this view and there are other studies (Rutter, et al. 1979) that have come to different conclusions. The evidence that Professor Tomlinson and his colleagues have produced looks promising. Furthermore, there are other models of successful small schools. The Danish folk schools, for instance, are often very small even though pupils remain in them from 6-16 years of age. Some of the American Junior High Schools and many Canadian rural schools are also models of good practice within small-scale institutions.

General Policy Issues

The general policy issues that the report addresses are interesting. The first is that the case against small schools, made by the Department of Education and Science over many years, is unproven (the figure of 600 pupils is used to define a small school). As the researchers point out, schools of this size can be effective. This effectiveness depends on their ability to contain their costs. There are a number of underlying issues in this proposition which it may be worth exploring. First, small schools need a flexible approach by teachers, yet the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) makes it harder to use teachers in a flexible way. The trend is for more and more specialist teachers to be required. Yet schools frequently need teachers with generic rather than specialist skills. A second underlying issue concerns the age range of pupils in the school. It is clearly much easier to cover the curriculum if the span ends at 16 than if the span incorporates the two years of post-compulsory schooling which, traditionally, have offered the most variety of choice to students. A third underlying factor in the argument is the lack of an agreed definition of what constitutes an effective school. The definition that I have tended to use in my research is related to the idea of a 'value added' component. A school that achieves greater progress for its students than would be expected from consideration of its intake, can be considered effective.

The last policy point on which I wish to comment is the relationship with the schools' social context. I agree with the researchers

that the notion of a school's community is complex. I recognise the different kinds of community that the report discusses: the community of interest as well as the geographical community. These are valid points to make and are, perhaps, especially important at the time when community education is under such financial pressure.

Theoretical Issues

Finally, I wish to comment on some of the theoretical issues underpinning this research and its policy questions. Here I wish to acknowledge my debt to George and Theresa Smith, of the Social Administration Department of Oxford University. They have recently drawn attention to the four models of policy research (Smith and Smith, forthcoming). The first is what is termed the 'engineering model', described by Bulmer (1982). In this model facts speak for themselves; there is a simple transition from research to policy making. Research is basically seen as a technical process. Such a model has problems of course: few choices for the researchers; no change of accumulating findings over years; and great problems of how to deal with values. Should the values of the customer be adopted or should the values of the researcher be used? This model of policy research does not entirely fit the small school study although, clearly, there are some common elements. The second model that the Smiths describe is based on the 'political arithmetic' tradition. This, of course, is the Oxford tradition incorporated in the work of Halsey (1972) and Glass (1981). It seeks to describe what is there and yet also to address the underlying social and political issues. As a model it is far from value-free: it seeks to combine objective data collection with a value affected interpretation. The researchers have the opportunity to state their values but must also recognise the influence that they may have on their recommendations. Such a model can draw on the accumulation of findings and can assign an active role to researchers. Does this model fit the small school study?

The Smiths' third model is called 'research as enlightenment'. It is based largely on the work of Janowitz (1972). He has proposed the idea that research operates only by subtle means — a process of permeation. The model accepts that research seldom presents clear options but, instead, provides data. These data enable the background of the research to be discussed, its generalisability and

replicability to be explored. Its use is that it makes policy makers think about the issues and increases their options for action. The model also accepts the notion of values. It recognises that there may be an inherent problem and clash of values between the researchers in their particular culture and the values of the policy makers in theirs.

The fourth model the Smiths describe 'value-critical research', is based on the work of Rein (1976). Rein challenges the linear conception of theoretical ideas leading to empirical studies which, in turn, may lead to policy formulation. He argues that 'theory itself cannot be divorced from practice or policy, it is simply another expression of it'. Basically, Rein sees policy makers working within a general framework which has its own particular values, benefits, costs and so forth. He sees the role of critical researchers as revealing and testing a series of assumptions. The accumulation of findings is thus possible and he uses the example of the cycle of poverty research supported by the SSRC in the 1970s to illustrate his point.

These models are interesting in the way they address the problems of values and the different roles of researcher and policy maker. In my own judgement, the political arithmetic tradition is the best fit in relation to the small school study though, in the real world, research is likely, inevitably, to be more of a hybrid.

In conclusion, may I express my thanks for being permitted to take part in this policy seminar. At a time of so much educational change based on legislation and on other initiatives, it is imperative that policy-oriented research takes place and that researchers and policy makers, together, consider its findings and the implications of these for the world which we both serve.

References

Bulmer, M. (1982) *The uses of social research: social investigation in public policy-making.* London: Allen and Unwin.

Department of Education and Science (1977) *Curriculum 11-16 (Working Papers by HMI).* London, HMSO.

Fullan, M. (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Glass, G., McGaw, B. et. al. (1981) *Meta-analysis in social research.* New York: Sage.

Halsall, E. (1973) *The Comprehensive School: Guidelines to the Reorganisation of Secondary Education.* Oxford, Pergamon.

Halsey, A.H. (ed.) (1972) *Educational priority.* Vol.1 London: HMSO

Hargreaves, D. (1991) *School Development Planning.* Paper presented at the International Congress on School Effectiveness and School Improvement, Education Department. University College, Cardiff.

Janowitz, M. (1972) *Sociological models and social policy.* New Jersey: General Learning Systems.

Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., and Ecob, R. (1988) *School Matters: The Junior Years* Wells, Open Books.

Nash, R., (1980) *Schooling in Rural Societies,* London, Methuen.

Rein, M. (1976) *Social Science and public policy* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Rutter, M. Maughan, B. Mortimore, P. and Ouston, J. (1979) *Fifteen Thousand Hours* London, Open Books.

Sanday, A. (1990) *Making Schools More Effective.* CEDAR papers, Warwick University, Coventry.

Smith, G. and Smith, T. (forthcoming) *'From Social Research to Educational Policy'* in Heath, A and Crouch, C. (eds) *The Sociology of Social Reform,* Oxford, Oxford University Press

Tomlinson, J.R.G.T. (1990) *Small, Rural and Effective.* Warwick University, Institute of Education, Coventry.
(Publisher's Note. This small limited edition is now superceded by this present publication).

Points Raised in Discussion

The following substantive issue were raised in the seminar after the presentation of the main paper by Professor Tomlinson and the response by Professor Mortimore. Two underlying themes were the *generalisability* of findings from particular research and the need for better information about the overall *cost-benefits* of small schools.

1. Using suspensions and exclusions as an indicator could perhaps be thought of as a surrogate marker rather than an actual indicator; the policies that lie behind them need to be studied to ensure that the marker was marking the same thing in each institution. The same would not apply to the way 'delinquency' was used as an indicator because the data were collected on a common basis outside the schools. There appeared to be a positive correlation between the findings for exclusions/suspensions and those for delinquency.

2. There was interest in the issue of generalisability. The ultimate concern is not with six schools, but with small schools more generally. The issue is that unless the *extent* of generalisability is examined and declared, people will draw highly generalised conclusions from research. It was not clear whether, for instance, small schools in quite different contexts could replicate the strong features of the ones in this study, whether it would be possible over a larger area, whether, for instance, the findings on costs are crucially dependent on the resource allocation procedures operated by Hereford and Worcester County Council in 1987 to 89, including the significant home/school transport costs, and quite how that comes into the picture both in these schools and also in other contexts. Also, the staff feeling a sense of commitment to a school and fitting in and feeling motivated to do all the things which John Tomlinson was talking about raised the

generalisability issue about them. Was it specifically smallness that encouraged and empowered those schools to draw that feeling out of the teachers?

3. The issue of whether teachers working 'beyond the bond' was a desirable basis (or even a feasible assumption in most schools) for developing a policy on the organisation of schools was raised.

4. The description, 'An effective school helps every pupil to realise his or her potential', was challenged on grounds of its accuracy and apparent neglect of the value-judgement about the objectives of schooling. John Tomlinson referred the seminar to his general definition, in the report, of the objectives of schooling, to which the challenge could not apply.

5. The distinction between whether it was the school size or the ability of the particular schools to be attractive to, and to extend, teachers with high levels of involvement and motivation was explored. The fact that they were rural was also a possible factor. The minimum argument being developed in the paper was that there was no necessary disadvantage associated with small size, not that there were inevitable and causally related advantages. The quality of a school was a function not mainly of size but of other factors, such as the quality of teachers, leadership, etc., in which size plays a relatively small part.

6. The issue of the cost effectiveness of the schools was not adequately explored in the report, mainly because of the nature of the data available at the time. But it was an essential part of the picture, given new forms of funding for schools, and was the key issue. This was especially true in the case of small primary schools.

7. In introducing his paper John Tomlinson argued further that during a period when national policies on the inner city, transportation systems, and the use of redundant agricultural land were all under review, the long term policy of concentrating secondary education in large urban schools, so far unexamined, should be brought under scrutiny.

Warwick Papers in Education No. 1

Small, Rural and Effective
a study of secondary schools

One in three secondary schools in England and Wales is considered small, ie. with below 600 pupils.

The past decade has seen mounting pressure upon small schools to justify their existence. Pupils' education in such schools is expensive on a comparative per capita basis and there are doubts whether the range of subject expertise within small schools is generally adequate for the delivery of the 'broad and balanced' curriculum required by the Education Reform Act 1988. Cost and curriculum combine to make the case for closure.

Yet, perversely perhaps, small schools are extremely popular with parents, pupils, their communities and, apparently, politicians, all of whom join forces to defend proposals for closure.

In this *Warwick Paper in Education Policy*, Professor John Tomlinson of Warwick University examines the policy issues emerging from a study of six small secondary schools, and concludes that the case against small schools is unconvincing. On a range of performance indicators they are shown as highly effective schools; they attract and retain good teachers, provide broad curricula, achieve high standards of attainment and have a low incidence of truancy and expulsions.

Professor Tomlinson argues that in a period when national policies on the inner city, transportation systems and the use of redundant argricultural land are all under review, the long-term policy of concentrating secondary education in large urban schools should, at least, be brought under scrutiny.

In response, Professor Peter Mortimore of London University evaluates the research by analysing its contribution to the school effectiveness debate and tracing its policy stance to different policy analysis traditions.

ISBN: 0 948080 70 1
Price: £4.95

Trentham Books

BEST COPY AVAILABLE